



The Gods Delight

The Human Figure in Classical Bronze

The Cleveland Museum of Art
Nov 16, 1988–
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October 24, 1988

IMPORTANT LOAN EXHIBITION OPENS AT THE CLEVELAND MUSEUM OF ART

The Gods Delight: The Human Figure in Classical Bronze brings together for the first time seventy-four of the finest Greek, Etruscan, and Roman bronze statuettes in American collections. Organized by The Cleveland Museum of Art, the exhibition opens in Cleveland on November 16, 1988, and closes on January 8, 1989. From Cleveland The Gods Delight travels to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (February 9–April 9, 1989) and to the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (May 9 – July 9, 1989).

Small bronze sculptures of the human figure are among the ancient world's most beautiful and original creations. The sculptures in this exhibition, ranging from the 8th century BC to the 4th century AD, are supreme examples of classical design and craftsmanship, eloquent testimony to the classical world's efforts to understand all human experience through the human body and the individual human personality. Most sculptures were gifts to delight the gods and beg their favor, but many were decorative objects made for their owners' pleasure.

For the Greeks, man was "the measure of all things," the central hero of their philosophy, drama, and art. The Greek artist challenged himself to represent the human form and then, in a leap of imagination,

to represent it moving freely and vigorously through space. Such works as Boston's powerful Mantiklos Apollo (700-675 BC) and the tender dying youth in the Getty collection (ca. 480-460 BC) document the remarkable progress of Greek sculpture in capturing physical reality.

The conquests of Alexander the Great in the 4th century BC spread Hellenic (Greek) culture, language, and art over a vast area. To the striving for physical accuracy was added an interest in psychological understanding, and a new interest in the female figure which matched the early Greek preoccupation with the male figure. Probably the most famous classical bronze statuette in the United States is the Metropolitan's "Baker Dancer" (250-175 BC), a veiled woman who in her soft, swirling garments radiates the sensual mystery of the dance and the dancer.

Greek and Etruscan bronze statuettes often look very much alike, since the Etruscans admired and absorbed much of Greek style. Several elements, however, can be readily identified as Etruscan: an emphasis on elegant silhouette, repeated curving forms, and a love of decorative surface pattern. Often called the finest Etruscan bronze in the United States, Cleveland's Death of Sarpedon group (early 4th century BC) was once the handle for a cista, a large jewelry box. Although the subject is taken from Greek literature, probably Homer's description of the Trojan War in the Iliad, the complex silhouette and intricately decorated surface mark it as Etruscan. The Romans absorbed much of Etruscan culture and embarked on an ardent love affair with Greek art and culture. Roman art frequently drew on Greek models for its inspiration. The 1st century AD Victory with a Cornucopia in the Cleveland collection is an exceptionally fine example, a winged female figure based on classical Greek body, drapery, and seriousness of spirit.

In the embattled and eventually Christian world of the late Roman empire, classical subject matter was transformed: winged victories could become angels; philosophers and orators could become apostles and saints; Apollo and Orpheus could become the shepherd David or even Christ. The history of the classical bronze statuette essentially ends at that point, to be revived many centuries later in the rediscovery of the classical world that we call the Renaissance.

The Gods Delight was organized by Arielle P. Kozloff, curator of ancient art at The Cleveland Museum of Art, with David Gordon Mitten, James Loeb Professor of Classical Art and Archaeology at Harvard University and curator of ancient art at the Fogg and Sackler Museum's of Harvard University. They and three colleagues--Suzannah Fabing of The National Gallery of Art, Washington; John J. Herrmann, Jr., of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; and Marion True, of The J. Paul Getty Museum, Malibu--chose the objects and wrote the catalogue. It will be published by The Cleveland Museum of Art and distributed by Indiana University Press (\$25 paperback; \$40 hardcover).

The exhibition and its accompanying public programs--lectures, films, and events offered to the public--are made possible by Ameritrust. The exhibition is also assisted by the National Endowment for the Arts and the Ohio Arts Council.

Admission to all programs, as well as to the Museum and to special exhibitions, is free.

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For additional information, photographs, color slides, please contact the Public Information Office, The Cleveland Museum of Art, 11150 East Boulevard, Cleveland OH 44106; 216/421-7340.